



Investing in All of Child Welfare

The Child Welfare League of America (CWLA) believes that providing a full continuum of care and services will help all children reach their full potential. This continuum includes policies and programs that together create a foundation of *stable families for stronger children*.

Research shows that being part of a stable family in a thriving community gives children the best shot to have a successful life. Effective policies are needed to strengthen families with the tools they need to create nurturing relationships and safe environments for children.

Child welfare's continuum of care includes *prevention of child abuse* before it happens and *intervention services that can prevent the separation of children* from their families. It includes limited but *quality foster care placements* that can support children that will be reunified with their families and foster parent readiness to succeed in parenting the most vulnerable of children. It includes *permanency for children* and stronger families for children who are *reunited, adopted or supported by relatives*. For youth who we have failed to help find a permanent family, child welfare should provide a range of services and resources that guarantee *successful transition into adulthood with permanent connections*.

Prevention of Child Abuse Before it Happens

Successfully reducing foster care placements begins with efforts to prevent child abuse and neglect before a call to child protection services (CPS) occurs. Primary prevention efforts are critically important to strengthen families and prevent initial and ongoing maltreatment. As the Children's Bureau has highlighted, the root causes of many of these difficult issues often are associated with parental trauma and the erosion of protective factors. Protective factors come from resources, supports, or coping strategies that allow parents to parent effectively, even under stress. We can focus on family strengths while building resilience, developing parental skills, and gaining knowledge of resources that can decrease exposure to risks. This requires an upfront investment regardless of what is being funded in other parts of child welfare.

In the 116th Congress, CWLA will be working to build family-strengthening efforts through greater support and funding for the Child Abuse Prevention Treatment Act

(CAPTA), the Community-Based Child Abuse Prevention (CB-CAP) grant program, and many other critical family support programs, including but not limited to Home Visiting, child care, Head Start, and Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF).

Intervention Services that can Prevent the Separation of Children

We can prevent the unnecessary separation of children from their families, when appropriate, by providing critical intervention services that address underlying stresses and challenges on the family. Congress, with the passage of the Family First Prevention Services Act (the Family First Act, or FFA), took an important step in providing services for children at risk of entering foster care because child maltreatment has happened. More than 676,000 children were substantiated victims of child abuse and neglect in 2016. More than 269,000 entered foster care in 2017. We can help prevent many of these placements into foster care with better intervention services. The Family First Act allows states to provide mental health, substance abuse, and in-home services—intervention services that can strengthen families.

CWLA will be working in the 116th Congress to strengthen the FFA and its implementation by states through support of research that helps build an evidence base, for local collaboration between human resource and community-based services, and for increasing access to research.

Support Foster Care that is Appropriate, Temporary, and High Quality

When necessary, we must provide the best foster care placement that fits the needs of each child and each family.

Foster care that is *appropriate* means that we have not unnecessarily removed a child and that foster care is culturally right for the child and family. We will be respectful of cultural differences based on tribal heritage, race, religion, ethnicity, and gender identity, and are committed to the best interests of each child or young person.

Foster care that is *temporary* means that we will help the 51 percent of children and families that will be reunited each year and find the right permanency for each child who cannot be reunified.

Foster care that is *high-quality* means that we recruit, support, and retain foster homes and placements that are age-appropriate, providing the appropriate treatment in the right setting based on the needs of the child and young person

CWLA will be working in the 116th Congress to make sure we have a stronger foster care option. Even with the FFA, we cannot forget the unique needs of adolescents and youth who have been placed in group homes in the past. That means increasing the availability of family foster care. This will take investment, because these providers must be well supported through a stronger child welfare workforce, greater financial support, and appropriate training, including therapeutic care. We need a range of foster care options that meet the unique needs of infants and toddlers as well as the unique needs of adolescent and teens who may have faced a great deal of trauma due to too many placements and trauma from abuse and neglect. Temporary and high-quality foster care also means securing residential treatment that is provided in the most appropriate and limited ways.

In the 116th Congress, CWLA will be working to make sure we have enough family foster care, residential care, and care that is culturally appropriate. We expect to engage Congress on issues dealing with how we can increase family foster care, promote non-discrimination in the recruitment and placement of foster and adoptive homes, and support appropriate placements for youth that identify as LGBTQ. We will also highlight the importance of the Indian Child Welfare Act (ICWA).

Permanency for Children

Permanency for children means greater support for children that leave foster care to be reunified with family, supported by relatives or fictive kin, or adopted into a forever family. Each year, more than 51 percent of children and youth will exit foster care to be reunified with their families. Up to this point, there has been very little federal funding for this single biggest part of the foster care population that leaves care each year. The FFA allows for a new and potentially significant source of post-reunification services. If we can reduce the significant number of children that will re-enter foster care, we can have a significant impact on the number of children and youth who are in care.

Relative/Kinship Care

Relative (“kinship”) care also is significant in giving children a permanent connection to their families—whether it is the 24,000 relative caregivers covered by federal Title IV-E funds, the hundreds of thousands of families supported by TANF, or families without any federal financial support, these families headed by grandparents, aunts, uncles, and older siblings help to address the trauma of separation and keep families together. The FFA provides new support for relative caregivers, especially those in crisis. In addition, new

Kinship Navigator funding can provide resources and referrals for kinship families across age and income groups.

Adoption

In the 21st century, more than 55,000 children have been adopted from foster care each year. These forever families have been not just a critical solution or part of permanency; more importantly, hundreds of thousands of children have found forever families through these efforts. Adoption continues to provide hundreds of thousands of children a forever family after leaving foster care. The FFA also has the potential to help families that adopt with sometimes-critical post-adoption services through better access to mental health and other services.

CWLA will be working in the 116th Congress to promote ways that help families with post-placement services. This means exploring evidence-based approaches to post-reunification services, expanding access to navigator services for kin families, and gaining a better understanding of post-adoption services. We will also be working with Congress on a reauthorization of the Adoption Opportunities Act and continued funding for the adoption and kinship incentives fund.

Successful and Connected Adulthood

We have failed some children and youth in foster care. Nearly 20,000 young people “aged-out” or exited foster care in 2017, not because they found a permanent family but because they reached the mandatory age. For this reason, we cannot continue to fail them as they enter adulthood. There are supports that can be added in this effort, such as having all 50 states extend foster care to an optional age of 21. We can also increase our support of education and training vouchers and other critical transition services, including services pertaining to housing.

Investing in All of Child Welfare in the 116th Congress

CWLA will be working in the 116th Congress to build on supports for youth in foster care on how to address housing needs, mentoring, and financial supports. The 116th Congress will have many opportunities and challenges in addressing child welfare issues by funding and strengthening a full continuum of child welfare services. The Child Welfare League of America is ready to assist in these legislative, authorization, and appropriations issues.